

## Proponents say decision on airport limits future expansion

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**La Plata, MD** - Before the Charles County Commissioners began voting on the proposed amendments to the county's Comprehensive Plan Tuesday, June 28, Commissioner Bobby Rucci [D-District 4] fired a shot across the bow of where the plan was going.

Rucci suggested that approximately 80 acres to the north and south of the airport should be allowed for industrial employment associated with the facility, including 50 acres of Chapman Forest.

"The plan recommended by the planning commission has land around the airport as industrial employment uses," Rucci said during the debate. "One of the proposed amendments is to remove that.

"I'm trying to keep something in for the airport, for future economic development," he stressed. "You can't sell the airport without showing something."

The airport's future hinges on being able to expand, proponents have said repeatedly through many public hearings on the facility's future.

When proposed amendment No. 6 came before the board Tuesday, June 28 to apply the Watershed Conservation District land use designation to property surrounding Maryland Airport and the forested Indian Head Technical Park site--rather than Employment & Industrial Park District--sparks flew again.

"The company, along with their partners, had the opportunity to develop this land for several years and never did," noted Charles County Commissioner Ken Robinson [D-District 1]. "We paid a lot of money for this study, which determined it was the wrong place and the wrong potential use in this particular area."

"It is shortsighted to move to shut down a popular economic engine in our county," countered Charles County Commissioner Vice President Debra Davis [D-District 2]. "Unless we build up the economic engine in our county, we're never going to be able to give our citizens what they ask for.

"We also know the history of this land, which was set aside as a negotiation from another preservation area," she added. "You only get the answers you ask for. I remember we asked specifically for a study on how we could move forward quickly. To establish it so we would never be able to develop is disingenuous."

"Now we're changing what can ever happen down there," Rucci interjected. "I asked for a compromise. We promote things and then go back on our word. It's hard to bring people in our county if we keep going backward."

Davis said the decision also goes against the recent land use study.

"So much time and effort goes into getting public comment," she added. "We're trying to plan with facts and not just politically. We spent so much time and then we just go against it," Davis added.

After the airport's new zoning designation was switched to Watershed Conservation Development, Charles County Commissioner President Peter Murphy [D] said the vote needed to go the way it did.

"So much of that land around the airport is very sensitive," he said. "That doesn't mean we don't feel there is value in the airport. In the future, we intend to have discussions about how do we help the airport develop. I don't see it as an either-or situation."

Gil Bauserman, owner and CEO of Bauserman Service Inc., Maryland Airport, said in a statement he felt the county made the wrong call.

"I am disappointed by the shortsighted policy adopted by a slim majority of the commissioners," Bauserman said. "Their decision was based on politics and ignores the input of our federal and state partners, the county's own staff, and the land use experts that crafted the county-funded Airport Land Use Study.

"The good news is, Maryland Airport will continue to serve the Charles County community as it has since World War II," he noted. "With its strategic location, the positive 2016 FAA forecast for General Aviation, and the predicted shortage of aviation technicians and professionals, Maryland Airport is well poised to be an economic engine that provides both jobs and tax revenue.

"The bad news is, the commissioners that voted for this amendment of the Comprehensive Plan have once again missed a chance to foster the type of economic development our county needs, especially in Western Charles County."

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